

John Lewis

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The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln

John Wilkes Booth's Writings

Excerpts from newspapers and other
sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

(From the Philadelphia Press of yesterday.)

THE ASSASSIN J. WILKES BOOTH. His reasons for committing the deed. We have just received the following letter, written by John Wilkes Booth, and placed by him in the hands of his brother-in-law, J. S. Clarke. It was written by him in November last, and left with J. S. Clarke in a sealed envelope, and addressed to himself, in his own handwriting. In the same envelope were some United States bonds and oil stocks. This letter was opened by Mr. Clarke for the first time on Monday last, and immediately handed by him to Marshal Millward, who has kindly placed it in our hands. Most unmistakably it proves that he must for many months have contemplated seizing the person of the late President. It is, however, doubtful whether he imagined the black deed which has plunged the nation into the deepest gloom, and at the same time awakened it to a just and righteous indignation:

_____, 1864.

MY DEAR SIR: You may use this as you think best. But as some may wish to know when, who, and why, and as I know not how to direct, I give it (in the words of your master)

"To whom it may concern":

Right or wrong, God judge me, not man. For be my motive good or bad, of one thing I am sure, the lasting condemnation of the North.

I love peace more than life. Have loved the Union beyond expression. For four years have I waited, hoped, and prayed for the dark clouds to break, and for a restoration of our former sunshine. To wait longer would be a crime. All hope for peace is dead. My prayers have proved as idle as my hopes. God's will be done. I go to see and share the bitter end.

I have ever held the South were right. The very nomination of Abraham Lincoln, four years ago, spoke plainly war-war upon Southern rights and institutions. His election proved it. "Await an overt act." Yes, till you are bound and plundered. What folly! The South were wise. Who thinks of argument or patience when the finger of his enemy presses on the trigger? In a foreign war, I, too could say, "Country, right or wrong." But in a struggle such as ours (where the brother tries to pierce the brother's heart, for God's sake choose the right. When a country like this spurns justice from her side she forfeits the allegiance of every honest freeman, and should leave him, untrammeled by any earthly soever, to act as his conscience may approve.

People of the North, to hate tyranny, to love liberty and justice, to strike at wrong and oppression, was the teachings of our fathers. The study of our early history will not let me forget it, and may it never.

This country was formed for the white, not for the black man. And, looking upon African slavery, from the same standpoint held by the noble framers of our Constitution, I, for one, have ever considered it one of the greatest blessings (both for themselves and us) that God ever bestowed upon a favored nation. Witness heretofore our wealth and power; witness their elevation and enlightenment above their race elsewhere. I have lived among it most of my life, and have seen less harsh treatment from master to man than I have beheld in the North from father to son. Yet, Heaven knows, no one would be willing to do more for the negro race than I, could I but see a way to still better their condition.

But Lincoln's policy is only preparing the way for their total annihilation. The South are not, nor have they been, fighting for the continuance of slavery. The first battle of Bull Run did away with that idea. Their causes since for war have been as noble and greater far than those that urged our fathers on. Even should we allow they were wrong at the beginning of this contest, cruelty and injustice have made the wrong become the right, and they stand now (before the wonder and admiration of the world) as a noble band of patriotic heroes. Hereafter, reading of their deeds, Thermopylae will be forgotten.

When I aided in the capture and execution of John Brown (who was a murderer on our western border, and who was fairly tried and convicted before an impartial judge and jury, of treason, and who, by the way, has since been made a god), I was proud of my little share in the transaction, for I deemed it my duty, and that I was help-

ing our common country to perform an act of justice. But what was a crime in poor John Brown is now considered (by themselves) as the greatest and only virtue of the whole Republican party. Strange transmigration! Vice to become a virtue, simply because more indulgence in it!

I thought then, as now, that the Abolitionists were the only traitors in the land, and that the entire party deserved the same fate as poor old Brown, not because they wish to abolish slavery, but on account of the means they have ever endeavored to use to effect that abolition. If Brown were living I doubt whether he himself would set slavery against the Union. Most, or many in the North do, and openly curse the Union, if the South are to return and retain a single right guaranteed to them by every tie which we once revered as sacred. The South can make no choice. It is either extermination or slavery for themselves (worse than death) to draw from, I know my choice.

I have also studied hard to discover upon what grounds the right of a State to secede has been denied, when our very name, United States, and the Declaration of Independence, both provide for secession. But there is no time for words. I write in haste. I know how foolish I shall be deemed for undertaking such a step as this, where, on the one side, I have many friends and everything to make me happy, where my profession alone has gained me an income of more than twenty thousand dollars a year, and where my great personal ambition in my profession has such a great field for labor.

On the other hand, the South have never hesitated upon me one kind word; a place now where I have no friends, except beneath the soil; a place where I must either become a private soldier or a beggar. To give up all of the former for the latter, besides my mother and sisters whom I love so dearly (although they so widely differ with me in opinion), seems insane; but God is my judge. I love justice more than I do a country that disowns it; more than fame and wealth; more (Heaven pardon me if wrong) more than a happy home. I have never been upon a battlefield; but oh! my countrymen, could you all but see the reality or effects of this horrid war, as I have seen them (in every State save Virginia), I know you would think like me, and would pray the Almighty to create in the Northern mind a sense of right and justice (even should it possess no seasoning of mercy), and that he would dry up this sea of blood between us, which is daily growing wider. Alas! poor country, is she to meet her threatened doom?

Four years ago I would have given a thousand lives to see her remain (as I had always known her) powerful and unbroken. And even now I would hold my life as naught to see her what she was. Oh! my friends, if the fearful scenes of the past four years had never been enacted, or if what has been had been but a frightful dream, from which we could now awake, with what overflowing hearts could we bless our God and pray for his continued favor! How I have loved the old flag can never now be known. A few years since and the entire world could boast of none so pure and spotless. But I have of late been seeing and hearing of the bloody deeds of which she has been made the emblem, and would shudder to think how changed she had grown.

Oh! how I have longed to see her break from the mist of blood and death that circles round her folds, spoiling her beauty, and tarnishing her honor. But no, day by day has she been dragged deeper and deeper into cruelty and oppression, till now (in my eyes) her once bright red stripes look like bloody gashes on the face of Heaven. I look now upon my early admiration of her glories as a dream. My love (as things stand today) is for the South alone. Nor do I deem it a dishonor in attempting to make for her a prisoner of this man, to whom she owes so much of misery.

If success attend me, I go penniless to her side. They say she has found that "last ditch" which the North has so long derided, and been endeavoring to force her in, forgetting they are our bribe-bearers, and that it is impolitic to goad an enemy to madness. Should I reach her in safety, and find it true, I will proudly beg permission to triumph or die in that same "ditch" by her side.

A Confederate doing duty upon his own responsibility.
J. WILKES BOOTH.

4/20/65.

LETTER OF JOHN WILKES BOOTH.

He Confesses that He Was Engaged in a Plot to Capture and Carry Off the President.

His Participation in the Execution of John Brown.

A SECESSION RHAPSODY

From The Philadelphia Inquirer.

The following verbatim copy of a letter, in writing which is the hand-writing of John Wilkes Booth, the murderer of President Lincoln, has been furnished us by the Hon. Wm. Millward, United States Marshal of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania. It was handed over to that officer by John S. Clarke, who is a brother-in-law of Mr. Booth. The history connected with it is somewhat peculiar. In November, 1864, the paper was deposited with Mr. Clarke by Booth, in a sealed envelope, "for safe keeping." Mr. Clarke being ignorant of the contents. In January last Booth called at Mr. Clarke's house, asked for the package and it was given up to him. It is now supposed that at that time he took out the paper and added to it his signature, which appears to be in a different ink from that used in the body of the letter, and also from the language employed could not have been put to it originally. Afterward he returned the package to Mr. Clarke again for safe keeping, sealed and bearing the superscription "J. Wilkes Booth."

The inclosure was preserved by the family without suspicion of its nature. After the afflicting information of the assassination of the President, which came upon the family of Mr. Clarke with crushing force, it was considered proper to open the envelope. There were found in it the following paper, with some Seventy United States bonds, and certificates of shares in oil companies. Mr. Clarke promptly handed over the paper to Marshal Millward, in whose custody it now remains. From a perusal of this paper it seems to have been prepared by Booth as an indication of some desperate act which he had in contemplation; and from the language used it is probable that it was a plot to abduct the President and carry him off to Virginia. If this was meditated, it failed, and from making a prisoner of the President to his assassination was an easy step for a man of perverted principles. It also appears that Booth was one of the party who was engaged in the capture and execution of John Brown of Ossawatomie, at which time he doubtless inhibited from wise and his associates those detestable sentiments of cruelty which have culminated in this infamous crime. The letter is as follows:

1864.

MY DEAR SIR: You may use this as you think best. But as some may wish to know when, who and why, and as I know not how to direct, I give it (in the words of your master)

"TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:"

Right or wrong, God judge me, not man. For be my motive good, or bad, of one thing I am sure, the lasting condemnation of the North.

I love peace more than life. Have loved the Union beyond expression. For four years have I waited, hoped and prayed for the dark clouds to break, and for a restoration of our former sunshine. To wait longer would be a crime. All hope for peace is dead. My prayers have proved as idle as my hopes. God's will be done. I go to see and share the bitter end.

I have over bold the South were right. The very nomination of Abraham Lincoln, four years ago, spoke plainly, war—war upon Southern rights and institutions. His election proved it. "Await an overt act." Yes, till you are bound and plundered. What folly! The South was wise. Who thinks of argument or patience when the finger of his enemy presses on the trigger? In a foreign war I, too, could say, "country, right or wrong." But in a struggle such as ours (where the brother tries to pierce the brother's heart), for God's sake, choose the right. When a country like this spurns justice from her side she forfeits the allegiance of every honest freeman, and should leave him, untrammeled by any faintly soover, to act as his conscience may approve.

People of the North, to hate tyranny, to love liberty and justice, to strike at wrong and oppression, was the teaching of our fathers. The study of our early history will not let me forget it, and may it never.

This country was formed for the white, not for the black man. And looking upon African Slavery from the same stand-point held by the noble framers of our Constitution, I, for one, have ever considered it one of the greatest blessings (both for themselves and us) that God ever bestowed upon a favored nation. Witness heretofore our wealth and power, witness their elevation and enlightenment above their race elsewhere. I have lived among it most of my life, and have seen less harsh treatment from master to man than I have beheld in the North from father to son. Yet, Heaven knows, no one would be willing to do more for the negro race than I, could I but see a way to still better their condition.

But Lincoln's policy is only preparing the way for their total annihilation. The South are not, nor have they been fighting for the continuance of Slavery. The first battle of Bull Run did away with that idea. Their causes since for war have been as noble and greater far than those that urged our fathers on. Even should we allow they were wrong at the beginning of this contest, cruelty and injustice have made the wrong become the right, and they stand now (before the wonder and admiration of the world) as a noble band of patriotic heroes. Hereafter, reading of their deeds, Thermopylae will be forgotten.

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I thought then, as now, that the Abolitionists were the only traitors in the land, and that the entire party deserved the same fate of poor old Brown, not because they wish to abolish Slavery, but on account of the means they have ever endeavored to use to effect that abolition. If Brown were living I doubt whether he himself would set Slavery against the Union. Most or many in the North do, and openly curse the Union, if the South are to return and retain a single right guaranteed to them by every which we once revered as sacred. The South can make no choice. It is either extermination or Slavery for themselves (worse than death) to draw from. I know my choice.

I have also studied hard to discover upon what grounds the right of a State to secede has been denied, when our very name, United States, and the Declaration of Independence, both provide for Secession. But there is no time for words. I write in haste. I know how foolish I shall deemed for undertaking such a step as this, where, on the one side, I have many friends and everything to make me happy, where my profession alone has gained me an income of more than \$20,000 a year, and where my great personal ambition in my profession has such a great field for labor. On the other hand, the South have never bestowed upon me one kind word; a place now where I have no friends, except beneath the sod; a place where I must either become a private soldier or a beggar. To give up all the former for the latter, besides my mother and sisters whom I love so dearly (although they so widely differ with me in opinion), seems insane; but God is my judge. I love justice more than I do a country that disowns it; more than fame and wealth; more (Heaven pardon me if

wrong) than a happy home. I have never been upon a battle field; but O, my countrymen, could you all but see the reality or effects of this horrid war, as I have seen them (in every state, save Virginia). I know you would think like me, and would pray the Almighty to create in the Northern mind a sense of right and justice (even should it possess no soulful of mercy), and that He would dry up this sea of blood between us, which is daily growing wider. Alas! poor country, is she to meet her threatened doom! Four years ago, I would have given a thousand lives to see her remain (as I had always known her) powerful and unbroken. And even now I would hold my life as naught to see her what she was. O my friends, if the fearful scenes of the past four years have never been enacted, or if what has been had been but a frightful dream, from which we could now awake, with what over-flowing hearts could we bless our God and pray for His continued favor. How I have loved the old flag envoicer now be known. A few years since, and the entire world could boast of none so pure and spotless. But I have of late seen and hearing of the bloody deeds of which she has been made the emblem, and would shudder to think how changed she had grown. O how I have longed to see her break from the mist of blood and death that circles round her folds, spoiling her beauty and tainting her honor. But no; day by day has the been dragged deeper and deeper into cruelty and oppression, till now (in my eyes) her once bright red stripes look like bloody gashes on the face of Heaven. I look now upon my early admiration of her glories as a dream. My love (as things stand to-day) is for the South alone. Nor do I deem it a dishonor in attempting to make her a prisoner of this men, to whom she owes so much of misery. If success attends me, I go penniless to her side. They say she has found that "last ditch" which the North have so long derided, and been endeavoring to force her in, forgetting they are our brothers, and that it's impolitic to goad an enemy to madness. Should I reach her in safety and find it true, I will proudly beg permission to triumph or die in that same "ditch" by her side.

A Confederate, doing duty upon his own responsibility.

J. WILKES BOOTH.

The President's Murderer.

To the Editor of The N. Y. Tribune.

SIR: It is earnestly to be hoped that the American people in their hour of sorrow and indignation for the dastardly and hideous assassination of the kind-hearted, good and noble Abraham Lincoln, will not make too much of a hero of the assassin. His crime is gigantic; and it is unfortunately in the nature of gigantic crimes to excite morbid feelings in the minds of the insane or semi-insane, and cause them to emulate the deed that fills all men's minds and occupies all men's tongues. Some years ago, several attempts were made to assassinate the harmless and estimable lady who sits on the throne of England. The attempts succeeded each other so rapidly that there seemed an epidemic of madness and assassination in the air—as difficult to explain as the cholera morbus. It was suddenly suggested by a student of human nature, that the desire of being spoken of, of being made the main actor in a great tragedy, had charms enough in the imagination of people of diseased intellects, to compel them to commit atrocious crimes; and that the best way to render attempted assassination unpopular was to dog on the bare back, every morning for a month or six weeks, the first wretch who should thereafter attempt to play the Brutus. The suggestion was acted upon; and since that time the life of Queen Victoria has been safe from the fanatics and the lunatics. These people have no fear of the gallows; but they vehemently abhor a whipping. Preparatory to the hanging of the monster, J. Wilkes Booth, a vigorous daily application of the whip on his naked earless, on the night and morning of every day intervening between his capture and execution, would perhaps not as a whole, be corrective to the aspirations of any other fools and villains, who may think that there is honor in murder. Believe me, yours respectfully,

April 18, 1865.

CHAS. MACKAY.

THE DEFENSE OF BOOTH

THE ASSASSIN'S LAST LETTER NOW MADE PUBLIC.

Why Wilkes Booth Struck the Last Blow of the Confederacy.

(From the Chicago Tribune.)
"My God! My God! I have no longer a country! This is the end of constitutional liberty in America." These were the words spoken with startling emphasis on the evening of the 14th of April, 1865, by John Wilkes Booth. He was passing down Pennsylvania avenue, in Washington, and near the corner of Thirteenth street had met John Mathews, a fellow actor and boyhood friend, whom he thus addressed. "He was pale as a ghost when he uttered those words," said Mathews to me a day or two since. "There were quite a number of Confederate prisoners along the avenue as he spoke, and when he said, 'This is an end to our constitutional liberty in America,' he pointed feelingly toward them. He looked at them a moment after they had passed, and was thoughtful. He then turned to me quickly and said: "I want you to do me a favor." "Anything in my power, John," I replied. He thrust his hand into his pocket, and, drawing out a letter, said, "Deliver this to Mr. Coyle of the National Intelligencer tonight by 11 o'clock unless I see you before that. If I do, I can attend to it myself." I took the letter, saw that it was sealed, put it into my pocket, and walked on. Booth, who was on horseback, rode rapidly down the street, and I never saw him again until he jumped from the box in Ford's theater to the stage, after shooting the president.

"Do you recall its contents?"

"Almost as vividly as though I had just committed them to memory. It began:

Washington, D. C., April 14, 1865.
—To My Countrymen: For years I devoted my time, my energies, and every dollar I possessed in the world for the furtherance of an object. I have been baffled and disappointed. The hour has come when I must change my plan. Many, I know—the vulgar herd—will blame me for what I am about to do, but posterity, I am sure, will justify me. Right or wrong, God judge me, not man. Be my motive good or bad, of one thing I am sure—the lasting condemnation of the north. I love peace more than life. I have loved the union beyond expression. For four or five years I waited, hoped, and prayed for the dark clouds to break, and for a restoration of our former sunshine. To wait longer would be a crime. My prayers have proved as idle as my hope. God's will be done. I go to see and share the bitter end. This war is a war with the constitution and the reserved rights of the state. It is a war upon southern rights and institutions. The nomination of Abraham Lincoln, four years ago, bespoke war. His election forced it. I have held the south was right. In a foreign struggle I, too, could say, "My country, right or wrong," but in a struggle, such as ours, where the brother tries to pierce the brother's heart, for God's sake choose the right! When a country like this spurns justice from her side she forfeits the allegiance of honest freemen, and should leave him un-

trampled by any fealty soever to act as his conscience may approve. People of the north, to hate tyranny, to love liberty and justice, to strike at wrong and oppression was the teaching of our father. The study of our history will not let me forget it, and may it never.

I do not want to forget the heroic patriotism of our fathers who rebelled against the oppression of the mother country. This country was formed by the white, not the black man, and looking upon African slavery from the same standpoint held by the noble framers of our constitution, I for one have ever considered it one of the greatest blessings both for themselves and for us, that God ever bestowed upon a favored nation. Witness heretofore our wealth and power. Witness their elevation and enlightenment above their condition elsewhere. I have lived among it most of my life and have seen less harsh treatment from master to man than I have beheld in the north from father to son. Yet heaven knows no one would be willing to do more for the negro race than I, could I see a way to still better their condition, but Lincoln's policy is only preparing the way for their annihilation. The south are not, nor have they been, fighting for the continuance of slavery. The first battle of Bull Run did away with that idea. Their causes since for war have been as noble and greater far than those that urged our fathers on. Even should we allow they were wrong at the beginning of this conflict, cruelty and injustice have made the wrong become the right, and they stand now the wonder and admiration of the world as a noble band of patriotic heroes. Hereafter, reading of their deeds, Thermopylae will be forgotten. When I aided in the capture and execution of John Brown (who was a murderer on our western border, and who was fairly tried and convicted before an impartial judge and jury of treason, and who, by the way, has since been made a god,) I was proud of my share in the transaction, for I deemed it my duty, and that I was helping our common country to perform an act of justice. But what was a crime in poor John Brown is now considered (by themselves) as the greatest and only virtue of the whole republican party. Strange transmigration, vice to become a virtue, simply because more indulge in it. I thought then, as now, that the abolitionists were only traitors in the land, and that the entire party deserved the same fate as poor old John Brown. Not because they wished to abolish slavery, but on account of the means they have ever endeavored to effect that abolition. If Brown was living, I doubt whether he himself would set slavery against the union. Most, or nearly all the north do openly curse the union if the south are to return and retain a single right guaranteed to them by every tie which we once revered as sacred. The south can make no choice. It is extermination or slavery for themselves (worse than death) to draw from. I know my choice, and hastened to accept it. I have studied hard to discover upon what grounds the right of a state to secede has been denied when our very name, United States, and the Declaration of Independence provides for secession. But there is now no time for words. I know how foolish I shall be deemed undertaking such a step as this, where, on the one side, I have many friends and everything to make me happy, where my profession alone has gained me an income

of more than \$20,000 a year, and where my great personal ambition in my profession has such a great field for labor. On the other hand, the south have never bestowed upon me one kind word, a place now where I have no friends, except beneath the sod, a place where I must either become a private soldier or a beggar. To give up all of the former for the latter, besides my mother and sister whom I love so dearly—although they so widely differ from me in opinion—seems insane, but God is my judge. I love justice more than I do a country that disowns it; more than name and wealth; more—heaven pardon me if wrong—more than a happy home. I have never been upon a battlefield; but oh! my countrymen, could you all see the reality or effects of this horrid war, as I have seen them in every state save Virginia, I know you would think like me, and pray the Almighty to create in the northern mind a sense of right and justice, even should it possess no seasoning of mercy, and He would dry up the sea of blood between us that is daily growing wider. Alas, I have no longer a country. She is fast approaching her threatened doom. Four years ago I would have given a thousand lives to see her remain—as I had always known her—powerful and unbroken, and now I would hold my life as naught to see her what she was. Oh, my friends, if the fearful scenes of the past four years had never been enacted, or if what has been had been a frightful dream from which we could now awake, with what overflowing hearts could we bless our God and pray for His continued favor.

How I have loved the old flag can never now be known. A few years since and the entire world could boast of none so pure and spotless. But I have of late been seeing and hearing of the bloody deeds of which she has been made the emblem, and shudder to think how changed she has grown. Oh, how I have longed to see her heart break from the mist of blood and death circled around her folds, spoiling her beauty and tarnishing her honor. But no. Day by day she has been dragged deeper and deeper into cruelty and oppression, till now (in my eyes) her once bright red stripes look like bloody gashes on the face of heaven. I look now upon my early admiration of her glories as a dream. My love is now for the south alone, and to her side I go penniless. Her success has been near my heart, and I have labored faithfully to further an object which would have more than proved my unselfish devotion. Heartsick and disappointed I turn from the path which I had been following into a bolder and more perilous one. Without malice, I make the change. I have nothing in my heart except a sense of duty to my choice. If the south is to be aided, it must be done quickly. It may already be too late. When Caesar had conquered the enemies of Rome and the power that was his menaced the liberties of the people, Brutus arose and slew him. The stroke of his dagger was guided by love for Rome. It was at the spirit and ambition of Caesar that Brutus struck.

O, then, that we could come by Caesar's spirit,

And not dismember Caesar, but alas, Caesar must bleed for it.

I answer with Brutus. He who loves his country better than gold or life.

JOHN W. BOOTH.

—Nov. 10, 1881.

BOOTH'S LAST LETTER.

The Assassin of Lincoln Wrote a
Frantic Public Appeal.

HIS DEVOTION TO THE SOUTH.

Slavery He Regarded as One of the Greatest of
Blessings for the Slave.

[BY TELEGRAPH TO THE HERALD.]

RICHMOND, Va., Jan. 5, 1890.—The letter said to have been written by J. Wilkes Booth on the day he assassinated President Lincoln, brief reference to which was made in the HERALD's despatches of to-day, is as follows:—

"Right or wrong, God judge me, not man. For, be my motive good or bad, of one thing I am sure—the lasting condemnation of the North. I love peace more than life—have loved the Union beyond expression. For four years I have waited, hoped and prayed for the dark cloud to break and for a restoration of our former sunshine. To wait longer would be a crime. All hope for peace is dead. My prayers have proved as idle as my hopes. God's will be done! I go to see and share the bitter end.

"I have ever held the South was right. The very nomination of Abraham Lincoln four years ago spoke plainly war—war upon Southern rights and institutions. His election proved it. Await an overt act? Yes, till you are bound and plundered. What folly! The South was wise. Who thinks of arguments of patience when the fingers of an enemy press the trigger? In a foreign war I, too, could say, 'Country right or wrong.' But in a struggle such as ours, where the brother tries to pierce the brother's heart—for God's sake choose the right. When a country like this spurns justice from her side she forfeits the allegiance of every honest freeman, and should leave him untrammeled by any fealty cover to act as his conscience may approve, and justice.

"People of the North, to love liberty, to hate tyranny, to strike at wrong and oppression was the teaching of our forefathers. The study of our early history will not let me forget, and may it never!

WHITE SUPREMACY ASSERTED.

"This country was formed for the white man, not for the black; and looking upon African slavery from the same standpoint held by the noble framers of our constitution, I for one have ever considered it one of the greatest blessings, both for themselves and us. God ever bestowed on a favored nation. Witness heretofore our wealth and power; witness their devotion and enlightenment above their race elsewhere. I have lived among it most of my life and have seen less harsh treatment from master to man than I have beheld at the North from father to son. Yet, Heaven knows, no one would be willing to do more for the negro race than I could. I but see a way to still better their condition. But Mr. Lincoln's policy is only preparing the way for their total annihilation.

"The South are not now, nor have they ever been, fighting for the continuation of slavery. The first battle (Bull Run) did away with that idea. Their causes since then for war have been as noble and greater far than those that urged our fathers on. Even should we allow they were wrong at the outset, cruelty and injustice have made the wrong become the right, and they stand now before the wonder and admiration of the world as a noble band of patriotic heroes. Hereafter, reading of their deeds, Thermopylae will be forgotten.

A FLING AT JOHN BROWN.

"When I aided in the capture of John Brown, who was a murderer on our Western border and who was fairly tried and convicted of treason before an impartial judge and jury, I was proud of my little share in the transaction—deemed I was doing my duty in helping our country to perform an act of justice. But what was a crime in poor John Brown is now considered by themselves as the greatest and only virtue of the whole republican party. Strange transmigration! Vice to become a virtue simply because more indulged in! I thought then, as now, that the abolitionists were the only traitors in the land and that the whole party deserved the same fate as poor John Brown, not because they wished to abolish slavery.

but on account of the means they have ever endeavored to use to effect that abolition. If Brown were living I doubt whether he himself would set slavery against the Union. Most or many in the North do, and openly curse the Union if the South is to return and retain a single right guaranteed to them by every tie which we once revered as sacred.

"The South can make no choice. It is either extermination or slavery for themselves—worse than death—to draw from. I know my choice. I have studied hard to discover upon what grounds the right of a State to secede has been denied when our very name, 'United States,' and the 'Declaration of Independence' both provide for secession. But this is no time for words. I write in haste.

HIS CONDEMNATION FORESEEN.

"I know how foolish I shall be deemed for undertaking such a step as this, where on the one side I have many friends and everything to make me happy, where my profession alone has gained me an income of more than \$20,000 a year, and where my great personal ambition in my profession has such a great field for labor. On the other hand, the South has never bestowed on me one kind word; a place where I have no friends except beneath the sod; a place where I must either become a private soldier or a beggar. To give up all the former for the latter, besides my mother and sisters whom I love so dearly, though they so widely differ from me in opinion, seems insane; but God is my judge.

"I love justice more than I do a country that disowns it; more than fame or wealth; more—Heaven pardon me, if wrong—than a happy home. I have never been upon a battle field, but, oh! my countrymen, if you could all see the effects of this horrid war as I have seen them in every State save Virginia, I know you would all think like me and would pray the Almighty to create in the Northern mind a sense of justice and right—even if it should possess no seasoning of mercy—and that He would dry up this sea of blood between us which is daily growing wider.

FRANTIC WORDS.

"Alas, poor country! Is she to meet her threatened doom for years? I would give a thousand lives to see her remain as I had always known her—powerful and unbroken—and even now I would hold my life as naught to see her as she was. Oh! my friends, if the fearful scenes of the past four years had never been enacted, or if what has been was but a fearful dream from which we could now awake, with what overflowing hearts could we bless our God and pray for his continued favors.

"How I have loved the old flag can never now be known. A few years ago the entire world could boast of none so pure and spotless. But I have of late been seeing and hearing of the bloody deeds of which she has been made the emblem, and would shudder to think how changed she had grown. Oh! how I have longed to break from the midst of blood and death that circles round her folds, spoiling her beauty and tarnishing her honor! But no; day by day has she been dragged deeper and deeper into cruelty and oppression, till now, in my eyes, her once red stripes seem like bloody gashes in the face of heaven. I look now upon her early admiration of her glories as a dream. My love—as things stand to-day—is for the South alone.

"Nor do I deem it a dishonor to attempt to make for her a prisoner of this man, to whom she owes so much of misery. If success attends me I go guiltless to her side. They say she has found that 'last ditch' which the North has so long desired and been endeavoring to force her into forgetting they are brothers, and that it is impossible to goad an enemy to madness. Should I reach her in safety and find it true I will proudly beg permission to triumph or die in that 'last ditch' by her side—a Confederate doing duty on his own responsibility.

J. WILKES BOOTH.

"Sic semper tyrannis.

April 14, 1865."

BOOTH LETTER, SUPPRESSED 60 YEARS, BARED

Missive Given to Star by Minnesotan, Copied From Confidential Files of U.S., Shows Kidnapping, Not Assassination, of Lincoln Was Plan.

Copyright, 1925, by the Minneapolis Daily Star.

Suppressed for 60 years by the government, a letter written by John Wilkes Booth on the eve of the assassination of Abraham Lincoln is given publication here today almost on the anniversary of the great political tragedy, which falls on Tuesday.

It was revealed for the first time by Col. C. E. Hinton, veteran Minnesota newspaper man, who received a copy of it from the secret service man who copied it from the confidential records of the government. No Washington official will admit knowledge of the existence of the letter today, and it is believed to have been destroyed.

Death of his old comrade a few weeks ago had unsealed the lips of Colonel Hinton.

Here Is the Copy of the Letter

Here is the letter, copied verbatim even to minor mistakes and incoherency due to the agitation of the arch assassin:

Right or wrong, God judge me, not man! For be my motive good or bad, of one thing I am sure, the lasting condemnation of the North.

I love peace more than life—have loved the Union beyond expression. For four years have I waited, hoped and prayed for the dark cloud to break, and for the restoration of our former sunshine. To wait longer would be a crime; all hope for peace is dead! My prayers have proved as idle as my hopes. God's will be done. I go to share the bitter, the bitter end.

I have ever held the South was right. The very nomination of Abraham Lincoln four years ago spoke plainly war—war upon Southern rights and institutions. His election proved it.

Await an overt act? Yes, till you are bound and plundered? What folly! The South was wise. Who thinks of arguments of patience when the fingers of an enemy press the trigger?

Justice Is Spurned

In a foreign war, I, too, could say, "Country, right or wrong," but in a struggle such as ours, where the brother tries to pierce the brother's heart, for God's sake choose the right.

When a country like this spurns justice from her side, she forfeits allegiance to every honest freeman and should leave him untrammeled by any fealty forever to act as his conscience may approve and justice to the people of the North.

(Continued on page three)

When I aided in the capture of John Brown, who was a murderer on our Western border, and was fairly tried and convicted of treason before an impartial jury, I was proud of my little share in the transaction—deemed I was doing my duty in helping our country to perform an act of justice.

But what was a crime to poor John Brown is now considered by themselves as the greatest and only virtue in the Republican party. Strange transmigration! Vice to become a virtue simply because more indulged in.

Extermination or Slavery'

I thought then as now the abolitionists were the only traitors in the land and that the whole party deserved fate as poor John Brown; not because they wished to abolish slavery, but on account of the means they have endeavored to effect that abolition. If Brown were living I doubt whether he himself would set slavery against the Union. Most or many in the North do and openly curse the Union if the South is to return and retain a single right guaranteed to them by every tie which was once revered as sacred.

The South can have no choice. It is extermination or slavery for themselves—worse than death to draw from; I know my choice.

I have studied hard to discover upon what grounds the right of a state to secede has been denied,

when our very name, "United States," and the Declaration of Independence both provide for secession.

But this is no time for words. I write in haste. I know how foolish I shall be deemed for undertaking such a step as this—where on one side I have many friends and everything to make me happy; where my profession has gained me an income of more than \$20,000 a year and where my great personal ambition in my profession has such a great field of labor.

No Friends in South

On the other hand the South has never bestowed on me one kind word—a place where I have no friends except beneath the sod, a place where I must either become a private soldier or a beggar.

To give up all the former for the latter, besides my mother and sisters whom I love so dearly, though they so widely differ from me in opinion, seems insane; but God is my judge.

I have never been upon a battle-field, but oh, my countrymen, if you could see the effects of the horrid war as I have seen them in every state save Virginia, I know you would think like me and would pray the Almighty to create in the Northern mind a sense of justice and right, even though it possesses no seasoning of mercy, that He would dry up this sea of blood between us, which is daily growing wider.

over

Alas, poor country, is she to meet her threatened doom? Four years! I would give a thousand lives to see her remain as I had always known—powerful and unbroken—and even now I would hold my life as naught to see her as she was. Oh, my friends, if the fearful scenes of the past four years had never been enacted, or if what has been was but a fearful dream from which we now awake, with what overflowing hearts could we bless our God and pray for His continued favors:

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My love, as things stand today, is now for the South alone, nor do I deem it a dishonor to attempt to make this man a prisoner to whom she owes so much misery.

If success attends me, I go penitent to her side. They say she has found that "last ditch" which the North has so long desired and been endeavoring to force her in, forgetting they are brothers and it is impolitic to goad an enemy to madness. Should I reach her in safety and find it true, I will proudly beg permission to triumph or die in that "last ditch" by her side.

A Confederate doing duty on his own responsibility.

Sic Semper Tyrannia.

J. WILKES BOOTH.

At the time of the writing Booth expected only to wound the president and kidnap him.

The story of how Colonel Hinton came into possession of the letter is released by the death a few weeks ago of the man who gave it to him.

This man, according to Colonel Hinton, was Lawrence Schoolcraft Sherman, known among his intimates as

"Nick," long the chief of the Northern Pacific railroad detective service.

Sherman roomed with Hinton in the early '80's in the old Winter block on Washington avenue here.

He had been in the Pinkerton detective service and had helped to quell the "Molly McGuires" in Pennsylvania. Later he had been in the postal service and other government secret service, according to Hinton.

"Sherman spoke to me one day," said Colonel Hinton, "of a letter he had seen in the government records, a letter which had interested him so much that he made a copy of it. This was the letter he gave me. I copied it myself but was sworn to secrecy in regard to the matter until such time as it would no longer embarrass Sherman, or until his death."

"Although the existence of receipt of such a letter from Wilkes Booth or its discovery in his effects has always been denied by government agents so far as I have learned, the letter rings true to me and has the hysterical tone that might be expected of a man under stress of great emotion or resolve as well as the high-flown quality of the born actor."

LINCOLN DEATH THREAT LETTER BARED FOR THE FIRST TIME



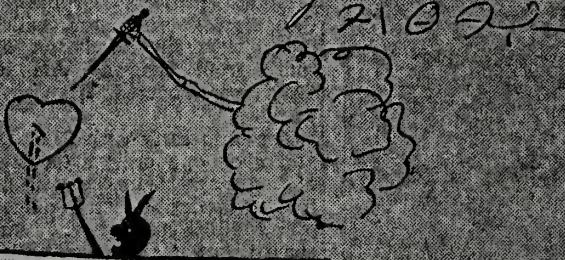
Behold your death warrant.

Virginia Nov 5th

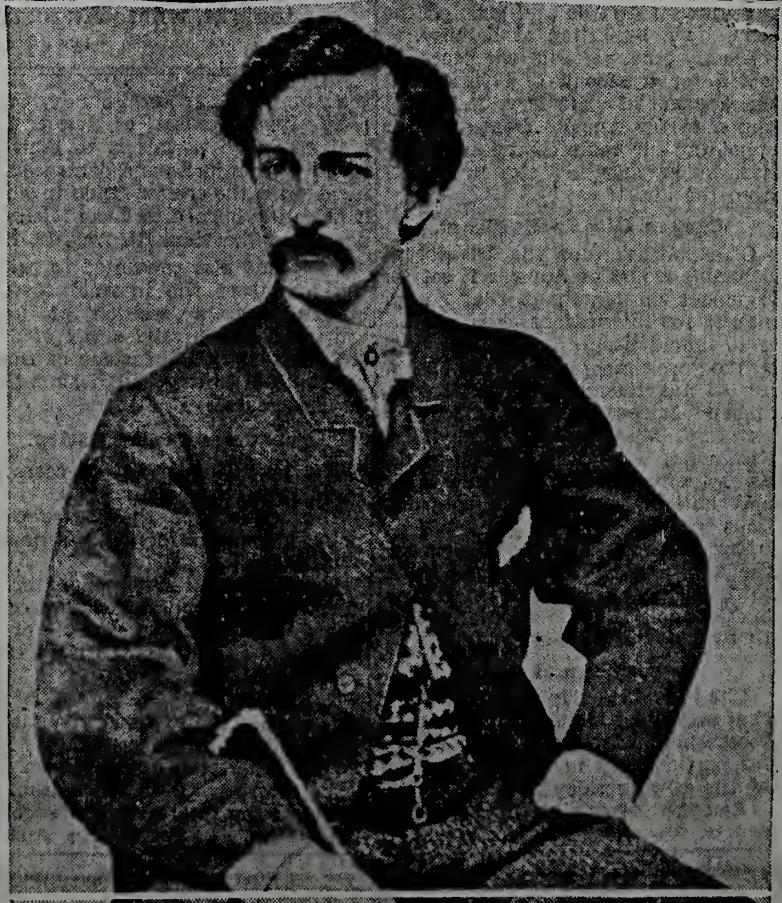
Abraham Lincoln.

We considering your principles to be at enmity to our dearest rights, condescend to address you in polite gentlemanly language, although a beast is unworthy of the notice of your humble enemies. Nevertheless we feel it our duty to give you fair warning, of the cloud which hangs over you, charged with death in its most awful forms, is ready in the event of your election, to break over you & to utterly annihilate you & your damnable hellish set of hellhounds! Know therefore Old Abe, that a secret brotherhood exists in these groves & other numbers unknown & turned to sundry full armed men, who by all they

hold dear on this world and their hopes of the next, to send your black spirit encloped in all its clouds of wickedness to its proper abode, where in close union with its brother, Satan, it may make the terrible vaults of hell more temble & the tortures of the victims of your teachings more awful. Now beware! Take not any rash step lest your fall may be made sure. To your door more certain. Your broom stands in your hellish practice Seward, Sumner, Wilson, Burlingame, Bidings, &c &c are, we tell you, all spotted men, whose days are numbered & whose are as it were, a span long.



Facsimile of an anonymous letter threatening Abraham Lincoln and warning him that "death in its most awful forms is ready in the event of your election." The letter, never before made public, is now in the possession of Dr. W. E. Edlund, 101 South 5th avenue, Maywood.



John Wilkes Booth, crazed actor who fired the fatal shot in Ford's theater the night of April 14, 1865. There is reason to believe, according to Dr. Edlund, that Booth himself penned the warning letter, although experts have been unable to decipher the signature.

Chicago Historical
Society - Annual
Report

1969/10

John Wilkes Booth letter,
January 25, 1855.
An unusual expression
of the assassin's
flippant nature
and his
fondness for drink
Special Purchases Fund

Received Jan 25th
Under seal Jan 25th 1855

My Dear Friend.

I am at present seated in a very
isuing bar room, a comfortable log fire and the
Poplar wood which is sitting and smoking and
Bending forth a fury blaze up the chimney pipe
me much in mind of home, and yet the fire it is
home, but not my home, what I mean is that on
the place is ~~you~~ all sit in house Ed &
when I was passing here and it being very cold in then
I thought I would stop in a moment to warm my self
when I opened the door I saw the same old thing a
dozen fellows or more sit around a small table
either playing cards. I had not want to play but
Poker and Paper, and with this to go by
For your affec son John Wilkes Booth

Booth Speech Reveals a Killer's Mind

By HERBERT MITGANG

In 1860, more than four years before John Wilkes Booth assassinated Abraham Lincoln in Ford's Theater, the actor wrote a 21-page manuscript that showed his fanatical state of mind, his sympathies for the Southern secessionists and his association with the historical characters he portrayed in Shakespeare's plays.

Had these sentiments been known to the officials responsible for guarding the President, in the view of Lincoln scholars, it is possible that Booth would not have had such easy access to the Washington theater on April 14, 1865.

The manuscript, written in Philadelphia in December 1860, was intended as a speech, but it was never delivered. Nor has the manuscript ever been published. It was discovered last year in the theatrical archives of the private Players Club at 16 Gramercy Park South in Manhattan, the former home of Edwin Booth, the assassin's older brother, who was a better-known actor at the time.

"I think the J. W. B. manuscript is a fascinating document," said David Herbert Donald, a Harvard historian, who is now writing a Lincoln biography. "The 'speech' is revealing both of Booth's views on the secession crisis and of his disorderly, incoherent state of mind in this time of great emotional turmoil."

Note From Brother

An undated note appended to the manuscript, written by Edwin Booth, reads: "This was found (long after his death) among some old play-books and clothes left by J.W.B. in my house." After sorting through the contents of his brother's trunk some time in the 1870's, Edwin Booth burned the costumes and clothes but saved the manuscript.

The manuscript, which is now being made accessible to scholars for the first time, was found by Robert Giroux, the editor and publisher at Farrar, Straus & Giroux, while he was combing through old documents at the Players Club.

"I had a bit of a shock when I realized that the initials J. W. B. stood for John Wilkes Booth," Mr. Giroux said as he sat behind Edwin Booth's desk in a study overlooking Gramercy Park. A plaque in the room notes that Actors Equity was founded there in 1913. "Even though he was a rabid sympathizer with the secessionists, he believed he was defending the Union."

The manuscript is scrawled in heavy

black ink, in rather erratic handwriting, with crossed-out words, misspellings and grammatical errors. It was written in the house of his sister, Asia Booth Clarke, in Philadelphia, where Booth and his mother were spending the Christmas holidays.

'Fight With All My Heart'

In the rambling manuscript, Booth calls himself "a Northern man" who intends to "fight with all my heart and soul — even if there's not a man to back me" — for equal rights and justice for the South as well as the North.

Referring to the secession of South Carolina, he says that "she is fighting in a just cause with God Himself upon their side." But he adds, "I don't believe that any of us are represented truly in Washington" because the men there are "Abolitionists."

Booth blames the cause of disunion on "nothing but the constant agitation of the slavery question." He claims that the South has "a right, according to the Constitution," to keep and hold slaves. Furthermore, he says that the institution of slavery brings "happiness for them." True, he concedes, "I

try in 1859.

At no point in the manuscript does Booth mention the President-elect's name. Lincoln had been elected a month before the Philadelphia meeting and was still in Springfield, Ill. Mr. Giroux says that Booth began to write feverishly just after South Carolina seceded on Dec. 20, 1860.

Why did Edwin Booth preserve the fiery "J. W. B." manuscript? Mr. Giroux, who is president of the club's library, and Raymond Wemmlinger, the club's curator and librarian, believe that he recognized its future historical significance.

"Perhaps he thought the manuscript might help posterity to understand his brother's tragedy better," Mr. Giroux said.

Edwin Booth's immediate reaction to the assassination and the death of his brother can also be found in the Players archives. It is the draft of an open letter addressed "To the People of the United States" on April 20, 1865.

Grief for Family

In it Edwin Booth wrote, "When a nation is overwhelmed with sorrow by a great public calamity, the mention of private grief would under ordinary circumstances be an intrusion, but under those by which I am surrounded I feel sure that a word from me will not be so regarded by you."

Edwin Booth then called his family "afflicted" by the death of "our great, good and martyred President." To his fellow citizens, he offered "our deep, unutterable sympathy" and "abhorrence and detestation for this most foul and atrocious of crimes."

John Wilkes Booth's manuscript is not mentioned in the latest historical study, "Assassin on Stage: Brutus, Hamlet and the Death of Lincoln" by Albert Furtwangler (University of Illinois Press, 1991). But Mr. Furtwangler, a professor of English at Mount Allison University in New Brunswick theorizes that Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar" and "Hamlet" — plays in which John Wilkes Booth and Edwin Booth often starred — influenced his thoughts and actions on the fateful night.

The manuscript shows that Booth in part patterned his speech after Marc Antony's funeral oration in "Julius Caesar." When Booth leaped on the stage after firing his derringer, he reportedly faced the audience for a moment and said, in an allusion to Brutus, Caesar's assassin, "Sic semper tyrannis!" — thus be it ever to tyrants.

John Wilkes Booth found parallels in Shakespeare.

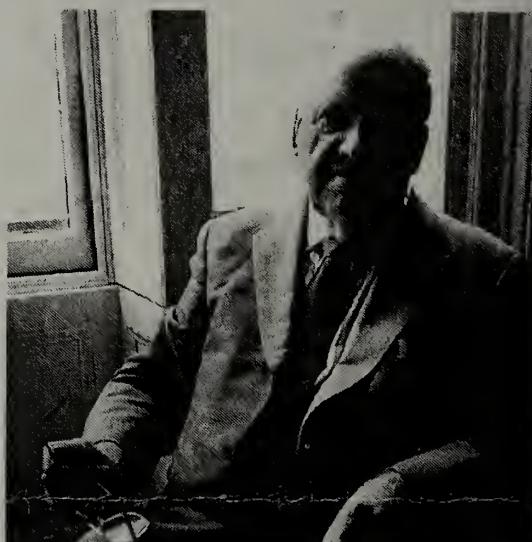
have seen the black man whipped but only when he deserved more than he received."

Somehow twisting the words of Iago in "Othello" to fit his own views on states' rights, he writes: "But he who steals my purse steals trash. It does more than that. It filches from me my good name. It induces my very servant to poison me at my meals, to murder me in my sleep."

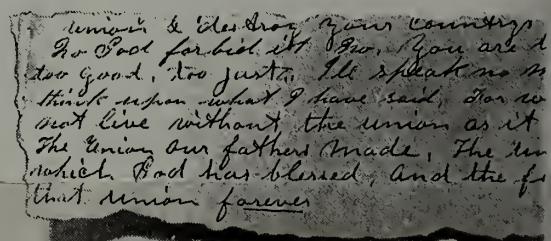
In the most personal sentence in the manuscript, Booth says, "I saw John Brown hung and I may say that I helped to hang John Brown."

No Mention of Lincoln

Mr. Giroux notes that, according to Booth's sister, Asia, the actor had briefly joined the Richmond Greys, a unit of the Virginia State militia, which helped to pursue and capture the revolutionary Abolitionist after the insurrection and killings at Harper's Ferry.



Lee Romero/The New York Times
Robert Giroux, the editor and publisher at Farrar, Straus & Giroux, with the unpublished manuscript, which he discovered, by John Wilkes Booth written four years before he killed President Lincoln.



Part of the manuscript in which the actor showed his fanatic mind and his association with the Shakespeare characters he



Frank G. Rankin
1816 Spring Drive
Louisville, KY 40205

THE COURIER-JOURNAL, SUNDAY, APRIL 12, 1992

A 3

Fanatical state of mind of Lincoln's assassin is revealed in manuscript

By HERBERT MITGANG
© New York Times News Service

In December 1860, more than four years before John Wilkes Booth assassinated Abraham Lincoln in Ford's Theater in Washington, the actor wrote a manuscript that showed his fanatical state of mind, his sympathies for the Southern secessionists and his association with the historical characters he portrayed in Shakespeare's plays.

Lincoln scholars say if these sentiments had been known to the officials guarding the president, Booth might not have had such easy access to the theater on April 14, 1865.

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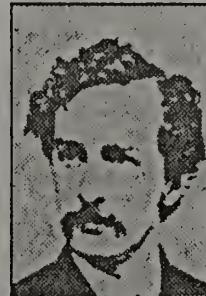
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Furthermore, he says that the institution of slavery brings "happiness for them." True, he concedes, "I have seen the black man whipped but only when he deserved more than he received."

Attacking the "free press," he writes, "Is it not (what Shakespeare says of the drama) to hold as it were the mirror up to nature?" He accuses newspapers of telling "a hundred lies calculated to lead mankind into folly and into vice."

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Manuscript offers glimpse into mind of Lincoln's killer

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New York Times

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